



Adapted from:
SAMHSA
Disaster Behavioral Health
Information Series

AFTERMATH OF DISASTER

Older Adults: Stronger than Sorrow

“I was in the Army and I saw a lot of bad things in World War II, but this is different. It seems like we're helpless against this kind of thing”. - Sam

Almost everyone felt a loss of safety after the Oklahoma City explosion. Now, after the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, we again feel vulnerable. Some people may have trouble sleeping or begin to have nightmares. Others may feel uneasy about going downtown or into large buildings. If you are feeling less safe these days, it can be very helpful to talk about what frightens you. Discuss your feelings with a trusted relative or friend. You may find that he or she is having the same kind of feelings you're having.

“My daughter keeps fussing at me to eat, but my stomach's been upset a lot and I'm usually just not hungry”. - Virginia

Experiencing a disaster may make us feel ill. Nausea, body aches, bowel problems, and skin disorders often appear when we are under stress. Some people lose their appetites while others begin to overeat.

There are several things you can do to protect your health. Do take care to eat adequate and nutritious meals, to participate in recreation, and to get enough rest. If your doctor has prescribed medication, be sure to take it as directed. Never take other medicines without permission from your doctor and make sure to stay away from alcoholic beverages and drinks that are high in caffeine, this could worsen your health condition.

“If I were younger, I'd go and help. I want to, but I figure I'd just be in the way”. - Edward

We find as we get older that our strength and stamina are not what they used to be. It's frustrating when we can't just jump in and set things right, but we can still find ways to help. For example, being a concerned listener to someone who's been affected by the disaster is an excellent way to contribute.

“The devastation is so total. It just breaks my heart”. - Ann

In grieving for people and property lost in the disaster, you might be reminded of other losses you have experienced in your lifetime. It's also possible that the disaster will bring back long-forgotten memories of other frightening experiences. If so, think about the skills that you've developed that have helped you in other times of crisis, and use them now.

“I don't need anybody's help, I've always taken care of myself and my family”. - William

People who have survived war, The Great Depression, and other hard times have earned a reputation as self-reliant. But no one should cut himself off from others or try to “go it alone”. Stay in touch with family and friends. Allow them to help and comfort you. Learn what your community agencies have to offer and let them know if you need assistance.

“How long will it be before these feelings fade?”. - Margaret

There's no standard time table for healing. Don't compare yourself to others, just take care of your health, talk honestly about your feelings, make time for recreation, and stay involved with your family and friends. You will, in time, feel yourself once more.

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